

# **2<sup>nd</sup> GBA Smart Tourism: Connectivity and Sustainability for Better Travel Experiences**

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## **Report**

### **Organized by:**

Hospitality and Tourism Research Center  
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### **Supported by:**

School of Tourism Management  
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&  
Macao Institute for Tourism Studies

## **Description**

Travelers' smart tourism experience is becoming important with the rapid advancements and wide applications of new technologies in the tourism industry. Tourists adapt to and increasingly rely on the utilization of technologies during each phase of their journey, from anticipation to recollection. The integration of technology and travel in the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) will increase travelers' accessibility to transboundary destinations, facilitate their responsive processes, and enrich travel experiences with ubiquitous information and service environment.

By applying new technologies, successful smart tourism destinations not only take advantage in creating and managing personalized tourism experience but are also characterized by dynamic interconnections and sustainable value co-creation among various stakeholders such as tourists, tourism suppliers, media, data companies, and local authorities through collecting, processing, and exchanging tourism-relevant data. Connectivity between tourists and the destinations and among different stakeholders, as well as the sustainability of destination development are two critical elements in achieving a better smart tourism experience, and were, therefore, the focus of this forum.

Though the involvement of new technologies in tourism enhances destination competitiveness in all aspects, a spectrum of different disruptions in the industry has been driven. To enhance the connectivity and knowledge/technology spillovers between the member cities of the GBA, it is becoming more important to understand what a smart tourism destination is, how the new developments and innovations shape the travel experience, and how destinations can benefit from these new technologies. Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in the GBA should pay great attention to the changes so that each member city and the whole area can maximize the benefits and competitiveness through technological developments.

According to the "Development Plan for Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area" which has been published by The State Council of the People's Republic of China in 2019, the plan aims to integrate the industries, technologies, peoples, and the region across the borders. The plan facilitates developing a new generation of information infrastructure and building a vibrant circle of smart city clusters. By making full use of modern technology, the GBA shall achieve the smart management of city clusters, bring more convenience to the residents' lives and travelers' visits, and build a quality living circle that is ecologically safe, environmentally attractive, socially stable, and culturally vibrant. In 2018, to achieve smart transport, several landmark projects, such as the Hong Kong–Zhuhai–Macao Bridge and Guangzhou–Shenzhen–Hong Kong High-Speed Rail Link were completed, significantly facilitated the intra- and inter-regional mobility as well as spillovers of tourism demand. Beyond these transport infrastructures, devotions to smart energy, smart municipal management, and smart communities were also highlighted to take forward the smart GBA development.

The GBA, with remarkable achievements in technology advancements and tourism developments, possesses excellent foundations and potential to develop into an international

smart tourism destination and a world-class smart city cluster. More various stakeholders across borders should actively exchange knowledge and sustainably co-create value for the region. Based on the relevance to the above-mentioned, this Forum contributed to the opportunities for transboundary authorities, businesses, and scholars to develop and share their ideas, deepen the discussion and connect with cross-border partners. It also provided a premier interdisciplinary platform for researchers, practitioners, and decision-makers to present and discuss the most recent innovations, trends, and concerns as well as practical challenges encountered and solutions adopted in the fields of smart tourism experience development.

**The 2nd GBA Smart Tourism Forum** aimed to bring together leading researchers and key stakeholders in the region to exchange and share their ideas, experiences, and research outcomes on the aspect of smart tourism experience development and set future directions for smart destinations, smart experiences and smart business in the tourism industry of the GBA. Under the theme of this Forum, the focus was placed on the tourism experience topics related to smart tourism and information and communication technologies in both conceptual and technical aspects, as described in the following section of Deliverables and Outcomes.

### **Deliverables and Outcomes**

#### **Achievement 1: Smart Tourism in the Greater Bay Area Forum**

Smart Tourism in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) Forum aims to bring together leading researchers and key stakeholders in the region. Scholars and practitioners in Hong Kong, Guangdong, and Macao were invited to exchange insights and share experiences in designing a “smart travel experiences in the GBA”. It would foster mutual opportunity and collaboration for the development of GBA smart tourism, and further strengthen GBA governance, coordination, and integration. A total of 118 international attendees registered for this forum from Brazil, China, France, Japan, Macao, Netherland, Philippines, Singapore, Spain and UK etc., including 54 in-person and 64 online participants.

The forum was held on 17 December 2021 with a warm welcome from Professor Jin-Guang Teng, President of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Dean Kaye Chon of the School of Hotel and Tourism Management (SHTM). This was followed by the session entitled “Knowledge Sharing Keynotes 1 – Smart Tourism Research and Applications” chaired by Professor Haiyan Song, Associate Dean and Mr and Mrs Chan Chak Fu Professor in International Tourism. The first featured speaker, Mr. Steve Hood (Senior Vice President of Research of STR and Founding director of STR SHARE Center) provided a comprehensive analysis of hospitality trends in the Greater China region using STR data. Professor Dimitrios Buhalis of Bournemouth University and visiting professor of SHTM of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University shared his insights related to current trends and future directions of smart tourism research that can be applied for the smart GBA tourism development. Professor Zheng (Phil) Xiang from Virginia Tech shared valuable insights regarding applications of smart tourism technologies for better travel experiences.

Following the academic perspectives, the “Knowledge Co-creation – Panel Discussion I (Designing Smart Tourism Products and Services)” chaired by Professor Qiuju Luo, Associate Dean of School of Tourism Management at Sun Yat-sen University (SYSU). Four featured industrial and academic speakers from the tourism and information technology areas were joined this panel discussion. Professor Zhouwei Haung of SYSU delivered a speech regarding travel experiences within and between online virtual space and real space. Ms Bowen Sun of Trip.com Group and Ms William Soo, Senior Vice President of Information Technology of Sands China Limited shared their industrial insights and experiences in terms of new business capabilities through smart technology solutions. Dr Cindia Lam of Macao Institute for Tourism Studies shared her insights about the growing importance of AI in tourism and hospitality, especially its opportunities or threats for employees in the hotel and tourism industry.

In the afternoon, the “Knowledge Co-creation – Panel Discussion II (Developing “Connected” Travel Experiences)” was chaired by Dr Dan Wang, Associate Professor of SHTM at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. This second panel discussion was organized by four featured industrial and academic speakers from the tourism and hospitality as well as information technology areas. Ms Xiaoyu Cheng, the founder and CEO of Lushu Technology shared a state-of-the-art of immersive technologies in metaverse travel. Professor Rob Law from the University of Macau and Dr Mimi Li from SHTM at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University discussed ways to enhance tourist experiences through technological innovations. Mr Vallois Choi of Hotel ICON – the teaching and research hotel built for the SHTM by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, shared his practical insights about the hotel’s digital marketing strategies in the GBA digital economy.

The last session entitled “Knowledge Sharing Keynotes 2 – Smart Tourism Innovations: Challenges and Prospects” was chaired by Dr Fanny Vong, the president of Macao Institute for Tourism Studies. Three featured speakers from various organizations, including Ms Natalia Bayona of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, Director of Innovation, Education and Investment), Ms Sarah Mathews of TripAdvisor, and Mr Daneil Chun of Smart City Academy, shared insightful experience and knowledge of smart tourism development. Online and in-person attendees could learn their insights on state-of-the-art technologies in designing and managing smart tourism development in the GBA. A wide range of issues related to smart city and tourism, the technological innovation of tourism industry in a COVID-19 world was discussed to integrate smart technologies for designing better travel experiences in the GBA destinations. The Forum has concluded successfully with closing remarks from Professor Haiyan Song of SHTM at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

### **Achievement 2: Student participation**

Eleven students from SHTM of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University organized this 2nd GBA Smart Tourism Forum. The forum held on 17th December 2021 drew attention to attract local, regional and international attendees. These student organizers were organizing the forum as they were enrolled in a unique subject in SHTM, “Special Events Project” which requires them to

execute a real-life forum by applying the event management theories learned in the classroom. Their duties include forum budgeting, marketing, designing visuals, programme scheduling, programme logistics, registration, sponsorship, VIP management, liaising with the webcasting company to produce a hybrid event for both online and offline attendees.

Through this experience, students learned the reality of event management and realized the difference between theories and actual implementation. Adding to the difficulty to their execution is the multiple-stakeholder nature of events, which often calls for a high level of flexibility, adaption, and changes. Through ironing out these challenges, students learned to polish their soft skills such as stakeholder engagement, leadership training, communications, time management, organizational skills, and project management. These final year students have gained invaluable learning experiences by organizing the 2nd GBA Smart Tourism Forum. Because of the highly competitive nature of this industry where recent graduates are expected to be both proficient and knowledgeable, having real-life experiences can provide the extra edge for students when they venture out into the job market after graduation.